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*Maine State Legislature
Augusta, Maine 04333*

June 1, 1999

Commissioners' Office
U. S. Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Commissioner:

We, the undersigned members of the Maine Legislature, are writing to express our concern that the current system of regulating genetically-engineered foods appears not to be working.

Recently, a Cornell University study published in *Nature* on May 20, 1999, indicated that pollen from corn genetically-engineered to include the **bt** bacterium can kill monarch butterfly larvae and, by extension, other butterflies which feed on milkweed and other plants merely dusted with **bt** corn pollen. Also, in an article which appeared in *Science*, on May 7, 1999, researchers from Kansas State University indicated that the strategy relied on by the genetic engineering industry to avoid corn borer resistance to **bt** may not work due to the traits of the insect. These reports have raised considerable concern among many of our constituents.

Each of these reports, by themselves, may end up with explanations that make them of little concern. Taken together, however, they appear to show a process based on FDA approval before we are clear about some of the longer term results. This is true, also, for issues of cross-pollination of non-engineered seed crops and for interbreeding of genetically-engineered commercial crops with wild relatives.

These pieces deal primarily with the environmental or ecological effects of genetically-engineered crops, which are primarily regulated by the EPA. But there are social aspects to be considered as well.

The current FDA policy of not requiring labeling of genetically-engineered foods will at some point present major issues for consumers on at least two levels. First, consumers who may have allergies to uncommon allergens will have no ability to monitor their diets to avoid these problems. Second, possibilities now exist of genetically-engineered introductions that would cross current religious dietary restrictions. Without labeling, consumers might be forced to completely avoid certain food groups to stay within dietary restrictions.

The time to act is now. Here in Maine we have been debating this issue for several years. Also, national surveys show that the majority of consumers favor labeling (*Time Magazine*, 1/99).

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In closing, we urge you to consider more complete analyses of the ecological impacts of the introduction of genetically-engineered crops before approval and to provide consumers with real choice through a labeling program for those products approved for market.

Thank you for your consideration of our serious request. We look forward to your action and reply.

Sincerely,

John Nutting, Senate Chair, Agriculture Committee
Wendy Rich, House Chair, Agriculture Committee

Chris Phil

David C. Schick

John L. Tuttle

Bonnie Green

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